THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 3. No. 7. Summer, 1964

With this newsletter we suspend printing operations until September. This does not mean that we will not be busy during that time. We will continue to fill all orders for material, although there may be delays in some instances; we will continue to answer our mail when and where possible; there will also be some activiity behind the scenes preparing for our next series of L.P. records, our sheet music programme (if any), and of course completion of Treemonisha.

We hear from people who have been to Club 76 recently, in not too encouraging terms. Visits are described as brief, very brief, and the word 'heartbreaking' creeps in here and there. How times change !

We are sorry to report that pianist Meade Lux Lewis was killed in an auto accident in Minneapolis on June 7. He was born in Louisville, Ky., and first studied violin, later taking up piano and was a pupil of Jimmy Yancey. His most famous number, Honky Tonk Train Blues was first recorded in 1929. However, it was not a successful number, and Lewis dropped from public view. Several years later, John Hammond, hearing the tune, searched out Lewis, whom he found washing cars in a Chicago garage. One of the high points in his career was a recital at Carnegie Hall. Better noted as a boogie-woogie pianist, he at one time teamed up with Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson as a three piano team. Mr. Johnson, said to be living in Buffalo, is the last survivor of the group.

The following is quoted from Dorothy Kilgallen's column of May 28: "Max Gordon, who just sold the Blue Angel nitery, will concentrate from here on in, on the Village Vanguard, his Greenwich Village landmark which is now in its 30th year. Max is embarking on a summer-long festival of traditional jazz with Ragtimer Max Morath kicking things off June 4." So, the Fair is not the only attraction New York offers this year. Max Morath will be there a month, and will have with him "The Original Rag Quartette", and instrumemtal and singing group devoted to the Era and the music there-in, ie., rags, cakewalks, rag songs, etc.

We also have word from Paul Keller of who plays where in the mid-west: Paul is finishing up in Colorado Springs, and goes to Sioux City, Neb. Percy Franks will be at the Golden Bee, in Colorado Springs, and Cap'n John Smith will be in Durango, Colorado all summer. Johnny Maddox is in Lacrosse, Wisc, and goes to Regina, Sask for most of July.

On page 49, Bob Ashforth reviews both volumes of The Professors with Brun Campbell and Dink Johnson. Both volumes may be obtained from the Society postpaid at $5.00 each.

St. Louis, Missouri, the home of ragtime is rumoured to be preparing for a banner year centred once again around 'Turn of the Century' themes, including of course ragtime. Featured nightly in the Natchez Queen in the GasLight Square Area are the St. Louis Ragtimers including Trebor Tichenor on piano, Al Stricker on Banjo, Don Franz on Tuba, and Bill Mason, Cornet. One of our correspondents who has heard this excellent group say that they "play what they want, and there is nary a 'Saints' nor a break-neck version of Maple Leaf to be heard. Trebor plays at least one rag solo each set and believe it or not, this is what the audience wants! (They've sure got them trained!)"

We also understand that the old showboat 'Goldenrod' will be open this summer again for the first time in many years, although we have no confirmation of this news. The Goldenrod has been lying idle, rotting at a St. Louis pier for many years, but will once again come alive to the music of the St. Louis Ragtimers.

There are also persistent rumours of a ragtime get-together in St. Louis late in June, and a ragtime festival planned for August. We have no further details unfortunately. What we need at this point is a St. Louis correspondent to keep us informed of goings-on there.

Any of our readers who plan on being in DURANGO, Colorado this summer will want to stop at the Diamond Circle Theatre there to take in "The Pursuit of Happiness", featuring Gary Smith on Banjo, Mrs. Teddie Beth Hardie-Smith on piano, and Dean Delaney on Bass. The trio will provide appropriate rag solos and rag songs before, during the show, during intermissions, and after the show. The show will run from mid-June to the end of September. Gary and Teddie Beth were married on June 6 and are looking forward with much anticipation to the summer of paid "work" which they love to do. Best wishes to the newly-weds from the Ragtime Society.

PLAYER PIANO ROLLS:

The QRS roll company lists a new rag in their summer player roll releases It is #9967, Temptation Rag, by Henry Lodge..."A Ragtime Gem".

On page 52 we reproduce an article which appeared in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch of Sept. 15, 1963. It shows the method which Howard Weilmunster uses to produce his own player rolls. It is one page from a 2 page article. The other page which we will print at some future date shows Hal Boulware also of St. Louis operating his Leabarjan Perforator which was a do-it-yourself roll maker common in the first 2 decades of this century.

RAGTIME REVIVAL:

The article on page 50 has been reprinted the July 1948 Record Changer, and is entitled 'Ragtime Revival' which obviously has been reviving for many years. Hindsight is always very easy to come by, and we found it very interesting to note that many of the opinions which are taken for granted today, were only being put forth as a suggestion, or on a tentative basis sixteen years ago. This article was of course written before Blesh and Janis had commenced their monumental research and compilation of facts as set down in 'They All Played Ragtime'. This book we firmly believe, marked the turning point in interest in ragtime, and the year 1950, a very significant one for ragtime.

In the U.K. most of the Society's ~~sheet music reprints~~ and l.p. records may be obtained at Pete Russell's Hot Record Store, 24 Market Ave., Plymouth. Write Russells for further information and prices.

RECORD REVIEW from BOB ASHFORTH

"The Professors" Volumes 1 and 2; Euphonic Records ESR 1201 and ESR 1202

Volume 1: Brun Campbell
- Maple Leaf Rag
- Barber Shop Rag
- Salome's Slow Drag
- Fragment
- Brun's Slow Drag
- Short Rag
- Essay in Ragtime
- Slow and Easy
- Blue Rag
- Lulu White
- Reminiscences

Dink Johnson
- Kansas City Stomps
- Twelfth Street Rag
- When the Sun Goes Down
- Cannonball Rag
- Las Vegas Stomp (titled Frog-I-More Rag in error)
- Dink's Blues
- Original Jelly Roll Blues

Volume 2: Brun Campbell
- Interview with Brun Campbell
- Ginger Snap Rag
- Tent Show Rag
- Grandpa's Stomp
- Frankie and Johnnie Rag
- Campbell Cakewalk
- Rendezvous Rag
- Twelfth Street Rag

Euday L. Bowman
- Twelfth Street Rag

Dink Johnson
- The Pidgeon Walk
- At the Jazz Band Ball
- Stomp de Lowdown
- Wolverine Blues
- Lazy Blues
- Lady Be Good
- Frog-I-More Rag

Brun Campbell, dubbed "The Ragtime Kid" in his teens, was a knockabout, working ragtime pianist; during the early ragtime years he roamed the Southwest, playing wherever a dollar was to be earned. Listening to these 18 numbers by him, it is not difficult to imagine the murky atmosphere and pungent aromas of the gambling house and saloon.

These recordings of Brun are somewhat lacking in quality, with the result that they contain some pretty wild variations in sound. About half the numbers sound as if they were played in the next room on an electric guitar. At other times Brun seems to have abandoned the piano for the harpsichord or organ, while occasionally there is the ghostly honk and clang of a steam calliope.

Brun's favorite style appeared to be a ragtime blues which he claimed was just one of many different ragtime styles used by the early pianists. Played with the electric guitar effect mentioned earlier, many of these blues numbers sound very much like present-day country and western music. He also plays some good slow drags, and a number of fine up-tempo rousers - such as "Essay in Ragtime" and "Reminiscences" - which have the ringing, strutting drive so beloved by Bob Darch fans. Once in a while, too - notably in "Campbell Cakewalk" - Brun lets the early Scott Joplin-classic ragtime influences come shining through.

The flip sides of these two LP's offer an added bonus: the New Orleans piano of Dink Johnson. Dink is not a ragtime piano player; in fact, his immense, surging rhythm and exuberant humor contrast quite sharply with the style of someone like Brun Campbell. Much of his playing has a strong Jelly Roll flavor (Morton was Dink's brother-in-law), as do his vocals and scat choruses.

Dink is an entertainer who serves up "everything in the line of hilarity" and has a rare old time doing it. "At the Jazz Band Ball" and "Kansas City Stomps" are special treats.

The third performer in this series - Euday L. Bowman - wrote "Twelfth Street Rag," the perennial novelty number of tenor banjo players and mickey-mouse dance bands. Bowman plays it in a buoyant, dancing style which injects new life into a tired old caricature.

Ragtime Revival

by john lucas

Step by step, jazz is delving deeper into its past, digging down to its roots, getting back to its sources. Musicians and critics alike, whenever they have stopped to look and listen in that direction at all, have moved quite unconsciously a single pace at a time—arriving with each new rediscovery at the next most recent development—all in all a fortunate style and rate of progress, calculated to render the process both more illuminating and more palatable to the greatest number. Bounding at once from King Benny to King Buddy would probably have proved too long a backward leap, not only for the majority of jazz fans but also for most of the jazzmen themselves, whereas proceeding gradually meant inevitably, eventually reaching back to Bolden.

With the triumph of swing in 1935 two very different movements were set going—one an extension and refinement of swing itself culminating in the bebop of today, the other a resurrection and recreation of all that lay behind the music of Goodman and the Dorseys, of Lunceford and Basie. It was only natural that in the latter movement—which is all we are concerned with here—the work of Jean Goldkette and Ben Pollack, of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington should have been the first to attract attention: they were the precursors of swing.

Next came the Dixieland revival—given impetus at first by Muggsy Spanier and Bud

Freeman, taken over later by Mezz Mezzrow and Eddie Condon—which ultimately brought new fame to the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, to the Wolverines and the Austin High Gang, to the Memphis Five and the Five Pennies. This was followed by a New Orleans comeback—originally stimulated by Bunk Johnson and Kid Ory, now represented by Lu Watters and Bob Wilber as well—whereby rightful recognition was given to the music of Buddy Bolden, Freddie Keppard, Joe Oliver, and Louis Armstrong. Shortly afterward an interest in march and parade music was promoted by the release of records by Bunk's Brass Band and by the Original Zenith Brass Band—an interest which has yet to take full effect. Then came a Blues renaissance, with vocalists Chippie Hill and Sippie Wallace recalling Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, Pigmeat Markham and Rubberleg Williams recalling Blind Lemon Jefferson and Le Roy Carr—with pianists Jelly-Roll Morton, Jimmy Yancey, James P. Johnson, and Earl Hines restored to favor not only through their own playing but also through that of such disciples as Cliff Jackson and Dan Burley, Montana Taylor and Cow Cow Davenport. Finally—in the persons of Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Sister Ernestine Washington, of Lead Belly and Josh White—came the recrudescence of Folksong.

All that now remains is ragtime, and every sign points at present to a forthcoming revival of this early piano music. No jazzman will have been more responsible for it than Morton, with his *Saga of Mr. Jelly Lord,* which traces in words and music not just the development of Ragtime but the whole history of jazz. Jelly-Roll's *New Orleans Memories* includes, furthermore, five of the finest ragtime solos ever recorded.

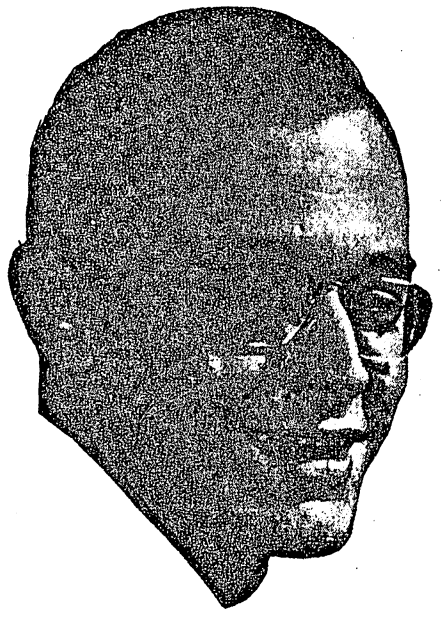
Eight other ragtime pianists will have proved scarcely less accountable for this revival—the white veterans S. Brun Campbell and J. Russell Robinson, the Negro veterans Dink Johnson and Alonzo Yancey, the West Coast youngsters Wally Rose and Johnny Wittwer, the East Coast youngsters Don Ewell and Dick Wellstood. To their names must be added those of Joe Sullivan and James P. Johnson, both of whom have done more than their share in bringing about such a renaissance.

That ragtime was not and is not solely a pianistic idiom has been admirably demonstrated by recent recordings of the late Mutt Carey and Tony Parenti, whose bands perform perfectly compositions by such ragtime pianists as Scott Joplin and James Scott. Here, too, Lu Watters and Bob Wilber have made important contributions. We may expect a great deal more from ragtime bands in the future: here at last some fresh material is to be found!

When the ragtime revival reaches its peak such legendary St. Louis pianists as Tom Turpin, George Randalls, and Charles Thompson will have to be ranked alongside those from New Orleans: Tony Jackson, Clarence Williams, Richard M. Jones—those from Kansas City: Bennie Moten, Julia Lee, Pete Johnson—those from Chicago: Pinetop Smith, Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis—those from New York: Lucky Roberts, Willie The Lion, Jack The Bear. From all reports, Louis Chauvin probably merits a rating equal to that of Fats Waller or Mary Lou Williams.

The outstanding result of such a revaluation, however, may well be the place it will ascribe to Scott Joplin. This fabulous figure, who came to St. Louis from Texas and died the King of Ragtime in 1917, deserves a position equivalent to that which W. C. Handy holds among composers of Blues. Like Handy, he wrote more great numbers than all his rivals put together. Like Handy, he was but an indifferent performer, though a matchless composer. Unlike Handy, he did not live to see either a slackening or a subsequent revival of interest in the music to which he had devoted his life. No composer except Morton has contributed more than Joplin to the heritage of America's jazzmen: may the Ragtime renaissance bring more jazzbands to a realization of his true worth.

dink johnson



johnny wittwer

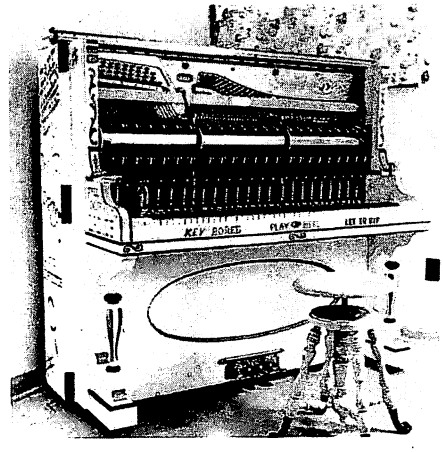
Reproduced from The Record Changer, July 1948

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK:

Bob Cantwell recently sent us a tape of 2 of Joplin's first published compositions, A Picture of Her Face, and Please Say You Will. He writes that after obtaining the music from the Library of Congress, he and pal Dick Dreiwitz took the music to a gathering of musical associates, principally from Julliard. They managed to persuade a pianist and vocalist to run through the numbers. The result is quite pleasant, and although in no sense ragtime, it may be said that the numbers are typical of the era. Perhaps Joplin was trying his hand before deciding on the up and coming ragtime.

Bob asks us if there is any interest in the pre-ragtime songs of Joplin and Scott. If any of our readers are interested, we would be glad to forward their correspondence to Bob.

Roger Brown recently sent us a picture of a 4-pedal upright grand which he located in a saloon in a southern Ontario town. Roger proceeds to recount the trials and tribulations involved in buying the piano, arranging for its transport, and then having the piano get bumped right off the truck. Apparently the major parts of the action, strings and sounding board were unharmed, and were reloaded onto the truck. Roger got his pieces homewith no further mishaps and spent many weeks of cleaning, painting and repairing the machine which is a Bell, manufactured in Guelph, Ontario around the turn of the century, and is shown at left. Although there may have been others, it seems that Bell led the way, at least in Canada, in the Production of 4 pedal pianos. We haven't seen any 5-pedal jobs around since Bob Darch blew out of town some time ago.



Those people in the Chicago area within range of Radio Station WEEF (AM & FM) should tune in Saturday afternoons from 3.05 to 4.00 PM for a programme of Rags Stomps & Blues. Mike Schwimmer puts on this hour and recently asked us to mention that he would be interested in hearing from listeners in the Chicago area who have players and rolls, or who play piano themselves. Mike says he'd be glad to arrange to tape them for use on his show.

Brian Bulgin writes from Ludlow, England of a recent get-together with Ken Wilkinson of Grimsby. Brian also writes in glowing terms of Ann Charters 'Joplin Bouquet', and compares Joplin's compositions with those of Mozart. Both write within conventional frameworks, both break through occasionally, and both with the same kind of sensibility. He believes the record to be a revelation, and Joplin to be a master composer of miniatures.

Idamay & Allen MacInnes have just returned from a trip to New England, via. New York, where they enjoyed Max Morath at the Village Vanguard. The V.V. is re-decorated in ' turn of the century ' flavour - red, red felt walls with large photographs of some of the great Ragtime composers.

Max has an instrumental Ragtime group, (2 banjos & guitarone - a Mexican instrument, really a portable bass) that is sheer enjoyment from the moment you hear the opening piece - Dill Pickles - which is followed by Cakewalks, other Ragtime classics - piano solos & songs by Max - lots of humorous 'turn of the century' patter - old illustrated song slides - and an hour is gone before you know it!

The three boys with Max are - Jim Tyler, Felix Pappalardi and Barry Kornfeld. They work together as a closely knit team and one could imagine hearing a group like this gathered around a Saloon piano in Scott Joplin's time. Sue & Mike Montgomery were with the MacInnes' the first night, and the following night Amelia Lamb, widow of Joe Lamb, was there with her son and daughter-in-law. Max made mention of Joe's great music, followed by his playing of Joe Lamb's "Ragtime Nightingale".

The World's Fair is fine, but Max at the Village Vanguard is GREAT! We're not sure how long Max will be there, but from the enthusiastic reports that have reached us, it would be worth the trip - even from Alaska - to enjoy this spirited evening of Ragtime. GOOD LUCK - Max!

In New England, the MacInnes' were at the opening of a great new restaurant and bar - Eagle House, Rowley, Mass., owned by fellow Ragtime Society subscribers Virginia & John E. Parker Jr. Eagle House is a converted 3-floor barn, with an exciting contrast of old wood background and elegant furnishings. The piano in the saloon-bar gave out Ragtime by Idamay, and more than one Ragtime enthusiast was born then & there! We'd like to see Eagle House become a centre of Ragtime in New England. GOOD LUCK - Virginia & John!

The article we mentionned from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch appears on page 53 and page 54 in its entirety.

Our next newsletter will be published in early September. In the meantime, all orders will be handled in the minimum delay possible.

Have a good summer, and let us know what you did, and who you saw in the way of ragtime.

Using plastic template that he designed, Weilmuenster outlines with pencil the holes representing notes of "The Rag Pickers Rag." Watching operation are two of his three children—David, 8, and Janice, 5. Template has 88 notches, one for each note of the piano keyboard. Below, Mrs. Weilmuenster, using a hobbyist knife, cuts through penciled outlines made by her husband. Paper is piano roll blank obtained from commercial firm. Weilmuenster spent 40 hours cutting his first roll. In two years, the Weilmuensters, who live in Ballwin, have made 86 rolls.

Old Piano Roll Buffs

Two St. Louis Fanciers of Ragtime Perforate Music for Player Instruments

By CHARLES SHERMAN of the PICTURES Staff

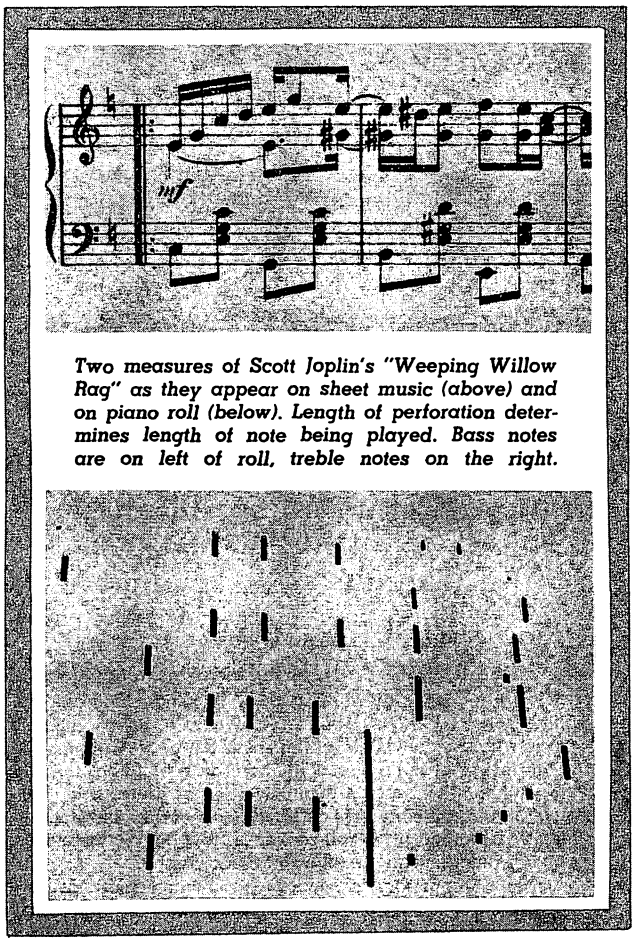
Two St. Louisans are keeping alive the glory days of player pianos by making their own piano rolls of ragtime music. One is Harold Boulware, a former electric organ salesman whose enthusiasm for player pianos led him into the full-time occupation of rebuilding the old instruments. He not only makes rolls of music but deals with piano roll collectors as far off as Sweden and Switzerland. The other piano roll maker is Howard Weilmuenster, a sign painter who cuts the rolls as a hobby.

In comparison to modern production methods, the output of both men is quite modest. It takes Weilmuenster 8 to 10 hours, using a homemade template and assisted by his wife, to perforate one roll. Boulware, using an antequated machine that he found in Buffalo, N. Y., can produce eight rolls in five hours. (Commercial firms produce 32 rolls in three minutes from their master piano rolls.) Both Boulware and Weilmuenster transfer ragtime tunes from sheet music to rolls, concentrating mostly on the works of such leading composers of the early 1900s as Scott Joplin, Joseph Lamb, James Scott, Tom Turpin and Arthur Marshall.

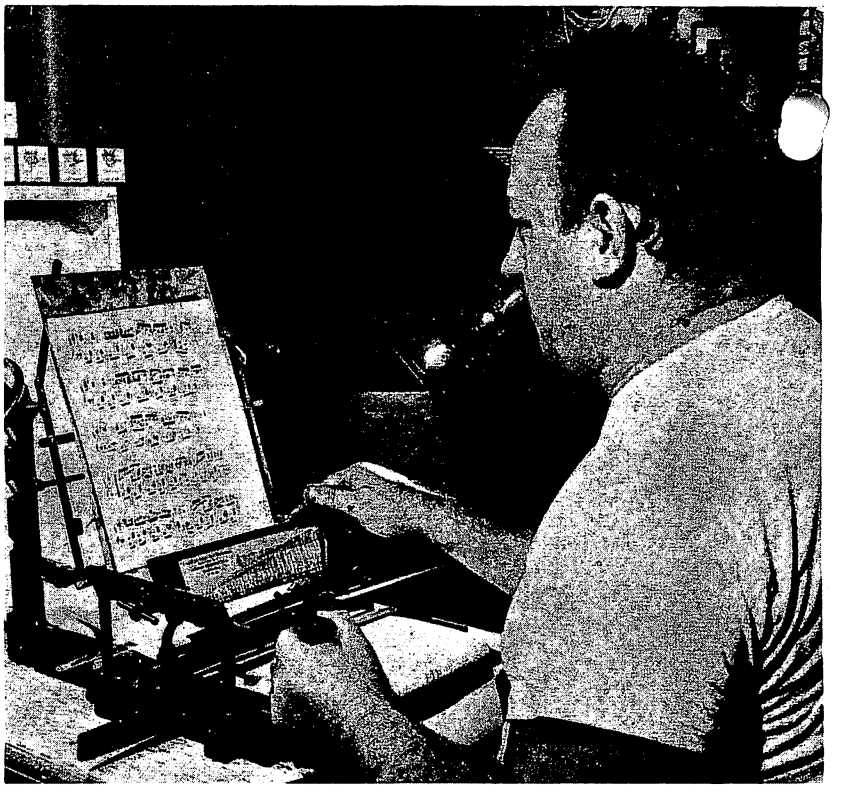
At the peak of player piano popularity in 1926, there were 18 music companies in the United States turning out 15,000,000 piano rolls a year. First radio, then the depression, and finally television took their toll until only one firm survived, that one producing a negligible amount of music. However, since the revival of player pianos, at least four new piano roll companies have emerged, including one in this country, and one each in Mexico, Australia and England. They mass-produce current hits in addition to old tunes. Many of the newer piano rolls have modern arrangements, without the tremolos and rinky-tink effects common in old-time music.

The demand for player pianos has reached such proportions that there currently are eight or nine companies producing the instruments. Mostly they are spinet models, smaller than the old uprights and, in the view of some player piano buffs, lacking the tonal quality of the old museum pieces. But this is a minor annoyance for pedal-pushing maestros playing a classic like "Maple Leaf Rag."

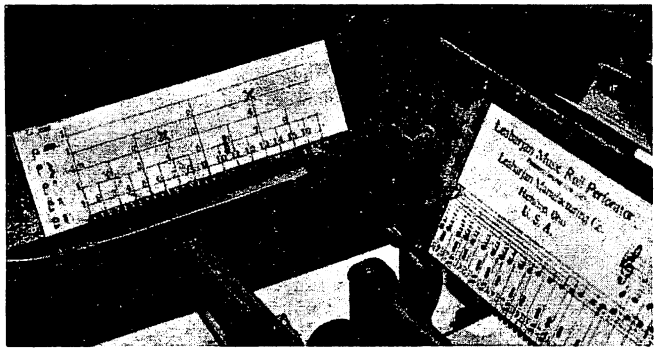
Photos by JACK GOULD of the PICTURES Staff



Two measures of Scott Joplin's "Weeping Willow Rag" as they appear on sheet music (above) and on piano roll (below). Length of perforation determines length of note being played. Bass notes are on left of roll, treble notes on the right.



With his left hand, Boulware operates the forward motion (four inches at a time) of his perforating machine, and with his right hand the lateral motion. Manufacturer of perforator went out of business in 1919. Originally designed to make four copies at a time, machine was modified by Boulware to make eight rolls simultaneously. In 2½ years, he has turned out about 1000 rolls. He uses the basement of his home in Florissant as a piano shop, where he has a dozen player pianos on hand.



Boulware depends on these two scales in perforating rolls. At left is time scale, used to control the duration of each note as it is played on the piano. Machine is set on notches from 1 to 2 to perforate an eighth note, from 1 to 4 for a half note. At the right is note scale, which accurately locates the note to be perforated.

Boulware's son, Edward, operates a 1912 vintage player piano that can perform with four different kinds of music rolls. With his left hand, young Boulware regulates the loud and soft levers, and with his right hand he controls the tempo.